

KNEE-DEEP IN A FROG POND



Photos by Frank Varga / Skagit Valley Herald

Youths from Mount Vernon's Kulshan Creek neighborhood walk through the shallows of Barney Lake on Saturday searching for signs of the endangered Oregon spotted frog. From left are Brenda Victoria-Reyes, 12; Elizabeth Hernandez-Garcia, 13; Maria Fernanda, 11; Marcela Partida, 11; and group leader Koreena Haynes of the U.S. Forest Service. A few small frogs, including the one pictured below — which is not the endangered Oregon spotted frog — were found Saturday in Barney Lake in Mount Vernon.

Children from Mount Vernon neighborhood help scientists search for signs of endangered species

By **RALPH SCHWARTZ**
Staff Writer

MOUNT VERNON — Kids love hunting frogs, and scientists need to find them.

Hence the happy marriage between the U.S. Forest Service, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Program. Children from the Mount Vernon neighborhood were tromping knee-deep through Barney Lake in a steady rain Saturday, looking for clusters of amphibian eggs.

The 14 youths, mostly in grades 6 through 12, found a frog or two, and a mass of salamander eggs, but not what they were really looking for — signs of the endangered Oregon spotted frog.

"The setback we had today was all the rain we've had in the past week raised the lake level



6 to 8 inches," said Koreena Haynes, Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Program director for the Forest Service.

"We found 25 masses in this same area (last Monday)," she said. "Due to the water level we weren't able to find more than one today."

The Oregon spotted frog

Description: Adults are 2-4 inches long, brown to reddish-brown with irregularly shaped black spots on their backs.

Habitat: permanent wetlands (marshes fed by springs or slow-moving streams)

Range in state: Once found throughout Western Washington and in isolated parts of drier Eastern Washington, the frog is now known to reproduce only in Thurston and Klickitat counties. The Oregon spotted frog is listed by the state but not the federal government as endangered.

Why are they endangered? Loss of habitat: Many wetlands have been drained, filled, developed or altered. Introduction of predators: Some fish species and the American bullfrog have been introduced into the Oregon spotted frog's waters.

Source: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

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Haynes added that the egg masses being found now are from salamanders. It's still too early in the season for frog eggs.

The Oregon spotted frog is not known to breed currently in Skagit County, but there are historical records of the species living in the county some 80 years ago. Scientists would like to learn just where this frog lives today so they can better determine what steps are needed to protect it.

The frog requires permanent wetlands for its home, and much of its habitat has been lost to development over the past several decades. The state labeled the Oregon spotted frog endangered in 1997.

Children from Kulshan Creek and other nearby neighborhoods participated through a program that provides educational opportunities out-of-doors for at-risk youths. But just because children are doing the scientific surveying doesn't mean the work isn't a rigorous part of a two-year population study, Haynes said.

"These results are quite serious," she said. "They're quite serious about researching this species to see if it still exists, and going from there."

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